

We Depend On One Another by orphan_account

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Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

El comes to visit Will on the most difficult night of their year.

We Depend On One Another

November 3rd, 1989

The bus pulled into its stop in Louisville, Kentucky, a few blocks away from the university. The doors opened with a hiss and a short girl with dark, messy curls and large glasses jumped down onto the sidewalk. El shifted her bag so that she could retrieve her map from it, before frowning at it and squinting at the street signs. She really did need to go and see the eye doctor again. Cursing herself for not allowing Will to come and meet her, she decided upon the road on the left, and set off.

An hour later, it was fully dark and she was no closer to finding where Will lived. She turned yet another corner and to her astonishment found herself back at the bus stop where she had started. She stamped her foot in irritation; a passing pedestrian jumped as a nearby trash can tipped over. Alarmed, she forced herself to calm down before sighing and pulling out her SuperComm. "This is El, calling Will. Do you copy? Over."

"This is Will," was the somewhat crackly response. "Where are you, are you okay? Over."

"I'm at the bus stop and can't find you. Over."

"Wait there, I'll come pick you up. Over and out." El flicked the power button, shoved the communicator back in her bag and glanced at her watch. It was only seven o'clock, and she was exhausted. Not to mention the fact that she'd had lunch at 11:30 and hadn't eaten since. She pulled out her water bottle, drained it and felt a little better, then sat on the curb until she heard Will's car horn. She jumped up as he pulled into the bus stop, before jumping out of the car and nearly knocking her over with the force of his hug. She hugged him back, laughing at his enthusiasm, before stepping back and taking him in. "What?" he said, laughing.

"Haven't seen you for over two months," she said. "You've changed."

"I have not!" he protested, and El had to fight back the snort of incredulity that would have been her response. He *had* changed – not much, but in little ways. The most obvious change was that he, too, was now wearing glasses, although they were smaller and sleeker than hers. His hair was still swept to the side and fairly neatly gelled in place, but was longer and he'd tucked it behind his ears at least twice since stepping out of the car. The flannel was definitely new, and he'd rolled the sleeves up to his elbow, which he never used to.

"You have too," she teased, adjusting her own glasses and raising her eyebrows. He grinned.

"Oh yeah, I got them last month. But that's it," he said firmly, and she laughed. "I missed you," he said, opening the trunk of the car and putting her bag in.

"Yeah, I missed you too." She got into the passenger seat before continuing. "It's weird at home now, especially since Jonathan went back to New York. The others have started their courses too," she added wistfully. "Except Dustin, did he tell you?"

"What? No, he didn't. You hungry?"

"Starving. But yeah, he got cold feet about a week after you left. Said he wasn't sure if he wanted to do chemistry or physics, and withdrew his application."

"I wonder why he didn't tell me."

"You never once asked him about his course?"

Will frowned, thinking. "I dunno. We've only spoken a couple times since I left, I guess I must have forgotten." El rolled her eyes.

"What's that man doing?" she peered out of the window.

Will winced. "Peeing, by the look of it."

"Gross." El wrinkled her nose. "Why are men disgusting?"

"Thanks." Will turned on his blinker and she groaned.

“Not Taco Bell, Will, come on.”

“You don’t like Taco Bell?”

“No one really likes Taco Bell,” she shot back, making a face.

“That’s so not true!” he protested, but he caved. “Fine, where you do want to eat?”

She shrugged. “You know the area.” Will wanted to hit her.

“Okay, there’s a burger place two blocks from here. Wait,” he glanced at the calendar on the dashboard. “Scratch that,” he added, feeling uncomfortable. El bit her lip. *Shit*, he thought. *Come on, Byers. You’re not the only one who this is a bad week for.* “Sorry,” he said awkwardly. El shrugged.

“Pizza?” she suggested in a small voice.

“Done,” he said immediately, checked his mirror and swung the car round.

Half an hour later they were sat opposite each other, quietly demolishing their pizzas. Both noticed that the other was a little sensitive, but since they had agreed that El would visit this weekend for that exact reason, they expected this. El and Will had spent this night together every year since 1985, but usually with other members of the Party. They almost never mentioned the reason why, or made any suggestion that the date was significant, it was just something that always happened. Tonight though, Will thought, would be different.

“El,” he started.

“Wait a moment,” she interrupted. “I wondered if we could... talk about that year.” Will gave a wry smile.

“Weird, I was going to say that.” She looked relieved.

“Do you want to go first?”

“No, go for it.” She thought for a moment.

“I just... I feel like everyone forgot,” she said slowly. “Like, I know we don’t need to talk about it all the time. I don’t *want* to talk about it all the time, but I... I don’t know.”

“Yeah,” said Will thoughtfully. “I know. I know they went through it too, but all of our experiences were so different – yours and mine in particular.”

“Right,” El nodded, sipping her soda before continuing. “And, I don’t know, but it’s been six years and no one has ever asked how I escaped the Lab in the first place. Is it just me, or is that weird?”

Will shrugged. “I don’t know, I guess they didn’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

“No, I see that, honestly. And I’m grateful, there’s a lot of stuff that happened that I absolutely don’t want to talk about, but...”

“...but because we never talk about it, it feels like people don’t care?”

“Exactly,” said El emphatically, slamming her cup down. The elderly couple at the next table glared at her, and she had the grace to blush.

“I think it didn’t help that I couldn’t talk about it,” said Will, running a forefinger round the edge of his plate and licking it. “Like, bad-government-men-would-have-come-and-shot-me couldn’t talk about it. Outside of the Party, Mom, Hopper, Jonathan, Nancy and Steve, nobody I knew had the full story of what happened to me.”

El nodded. “Same.”

“Only you couldn’t even talk to us about it.”

“Yeah,” she said with a trace of bitterness in her voice as she sipped her drink again. “I was such an asshole that year,” she added, the bitterness gone. Her voice cracked as she finished speaking.

“No, you weren’t,” said Will firmly. “When you ran away it was the first time you’d been outside in nine months. That’s enough to drive anyone crazy.”

"When I left the Lab it was the first time I'd been outside in twelve years," she shot back. "Was I crazy then?" She paused and sucked on an ice cube. "Maybe."

"Tell me about that night," said Will gently, and El raised an eyebrow momentarily. She considered it for a moment.

"It was both the best and worst night of my life," she said. "I, er, got past my guards and found a way out. That was boring."

"Boring?"

"Yeah. I'd been planning it for ages, I'd done it a million times in my head. It was when I got outside that things got interesting. For the first part, it was pouring with rain. I'd heard the rain before, but never seen it. It terrified me, if I'm honest. I nearly turned around and went back in, but I refused. I found a pipe, and hoped it led somewhere. I had no plan, no concept of what was going on around me. I was like a baby in the body of a preteen."

"I doubt you were like a baby."

"Do you know how many words the average twelve-year-old can understand?" Will shook his head. "Fifty thousand. Do you know how many I could understand, roughly?" Will shook his head a second time. "About a hundred. The average three-year-old knows more."

"You've researched this," Will said in surprise.

She looked smug. "I was in an argument with Dustin." She drank a little more while she collected her thoughts. "When Benny asked what my name was, Eleven was the only answer I could think to give him. It was the only thing anyone had ever called me."

"I still can't get over that," said Will quietly. "It's been five years since we met properly and it still trips me out."

"It's bullshit, is what it is," El said, and there was an anger in her voice Will had not sensed before. "Those bastards in that lab took everything from me when I had no power to stop them. They gave me a number instead of a name, and God knows I'd still be there today if I hadn't got seriously lucky." Will was quiet, unsure of what

to say. She sighed. "But I can't afford to keep thinking like that. I've got to leave it behind."

"That takes time," Will said, taking her hand across the table. "It's like holding a piece of broken glass. You don't have to put it down straight away, but you can't clutch it too tightly or you'll hurt yourself."

They spent another hour there just talking things through until Will noticed the waitress was giving them dirty looks. Will left a generous tip by way of apology, and they headed back to the car. "How are things with Mike?" El asked as Will started the ignition. Will gave a sad smile.

"Good, I think. I had a letter from him a couple days ago. Says he misses me and is looking forward to seeing me at Thanksgiving. I need to reply soon or it won't actually reach him before then," he said with a humourless laugh.

"But you're okay, with the long-distance thing?"

"Well, it sucks ass that I can't see him for weeks at a time, but we're working through it. And Max and Lucas are managing."

"I wish you'd stop comparing yourselves with them," said El crossly. "They're very different people from you and Mike."

"I know that," Will said, slightly impatiently. "I just don't understand them. Lucas went on vacation with his family for three weeks last summer and we heard nothing from him the whole time – not even a postcard. But then he gets back and Max doesn't arrange anything with him for three days afterward?"

"They're just not needy people," El said without thinking.

"Oh, and Mike and I are needy?" El opened her mouth to try and fix the damage until she saw that Will was laughing, and smacked him lightly on the arm.

When they arrived at Will's apartment, his roommate Tyler was already in bed, so Will quietly set El up on the couch with a blanket and some pillows, before settling down himself and falling into the deepest sleep he'd had in years.

Author's Note:

Yeah it's much longer than part one but I absolutely love these two so ٸ_(ツ)_/